



**Grier, Edward F., ed. Walt Whitman, Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts. The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman [Vols. 17-22] [review]**

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## REVIEW

Edward F. Grier, editor. Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts. The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman* [Vols. 17–22]. New York: New York University Press, 1984. lx, 2354 pp. 6 vols. \$345.00. [Vol. 1: Family Notes and Autobiography, Brooklyn and New York; Vol. 2: Washington; Vol. 3: Camden; Vol. 4: Notes; Vol. 5: Notes; Vol. 6: Notes and Index.]

These six volumes, the latest addition to the New York University Press's *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*, are massive, impressive, expensive, definitive, the product of more than twenty years of prodigious research, and certain to be of the greatest reference value to anyone seriously concerned with the minutiae of the life and works of the author of *Leaves of Grass*. Occupying more than 2,400 pages, with thousands of footnotes, a 30-page table of contents listing no less than 1,302 individual titles, and a 92-page index (in Vol. 6), this *collectanea* (Whitman's own term) brings the total *Collected Writings* volumes to 22. Still to come are the *Journalism*, the Manuscript Variorum of *Leaves of Grass*, and the *Bibliography*. Of the seven *Collected Writings of Walt Whitman* projects, only this one by Professor Edward F. Grier (of the University of Kansas) and Whitman's *Daybooks and Notebooks* have been designated by the Center for Scholarly Editions of the Modern Language Association of America as "An Approved Edition." The imprimatur is well deserved.

When Professor Grier and I were assigned by Gay Wilson Allen and Sculley Bradley, General Editors of the Whitman *Collected Writings*, the task of preparing the notebooks and other unpublished and/or uncollected prose, we decided that I would edit the *Daybooks*, *Diary in Canada*, *The Primer of Words*, Whitman's dictionary of words, and other notebooks in the Charles E. Feinberg Collection, simply because they were in Detroit and I was in Detroit; and Mr. Grier was to edit everything else. Even with his desire to edit *everything*—which I was reluctant to include in the edition—we had no idea that the Grier material would amount almost to twice as much as the White material. Excluding poetic matter, which will be included in Arthur Golden's forthcoming *Leaves of Grass MS Variorum*, the six volumes, increased from four at the last moment, incorporates so much over so long a span in Whitman's life that trying to accurately date the variety of writings proved impossible.

Therefore, Professor Grier has broken his assignment into these categories: Family Notes and Autobiography, Brooklyn and New York (which fill Vol. 1), Washington (Vol. 2), Camden (Vol. 3), and Notes (which fill Vols. 4, 5 and 6). This last-named material is further broken down into 22 sections: Proposed Poems; Explanations [and] Introduction to *Leaves of Grass*; Attempts to Define the Poet's Role and Tradition; Needs of American Literature; Study Projects; Words; American Writers; English Writers; German, French, Italian, Spanish, Scandinavian and Classical Writers; English History; World History; United States Geography; World Geography; Natural History; Philosophy; History of Religion; Religion; American Politics; Slavery; Education; Oratory; and Health.

The length of the individual pieces varies from only two words—with several of four, five, six, seven and eight words each—to 51 pages; others (and these are all

notebooks) are 39, 35, 30, and 20 pages, but most are two or three pages, or less than a single page. Each of the 1,302 has a headnote, giving the location of the manuscript, if it exists, a description of it with dimensions and the form of writing (in ink or pencil), its possible date, where it was first published, its relationship to Whitman's published writings, and other miscellaneous data. Rather than presenting a "diplomatic" text, that is, reproducing in type as close as possible to the handwritten form in which Whitman wrote the notebooks and the other prose manuscripts, Mr. Grier has given us "an uncluttered text, free of all symbols [lines, cancellations, carets, brackets, indentations] except necessary footnote numbers. Textual footnotes are in the same series with explanatory notes." As Whitman couldn't write three words without changing two, these "necessary" annotations, plus the useful and valuable indentifications of persons and places and events, add up to thousands. But such a publication as the *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts* demands this of its editor, and we can only be deeply grateful to Edward F. Grier for this enormous and taxing enterprise.

Of the 1,302 items, a little more than half, or 667, have never been published; the others have been printed in R.M. Bucke's *Notes and Fragments* (1902, and thus in *Complete Writings*, 1902), Clifton J. Furness's *Walt Whitman's Workshop* (1928), Charles I. Glicksberg's *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* (1933), Clarence Gohdes and Rollo G. Silver's *Faint Clews and Indirections* (1949), Horace Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (1906-1914, 1953, 1963), Emory Holloway's *Uncollected Poetry and Prose* (1921), and other now out-of-print volumes, and scattered periodicals.

One of the problems, of course, is whether all that Mr. Grier has dug up belongs in a work entitled *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*. Of the numerous hospital notebooks that Whitman made up and carried with him, especially those in Washington during the Civil War—which present a moving and pathetic view at first hand of the suffering of the soldiers and Whitman's overwhelming compassion—no one is going to question their publication, nor "The Eighteenth Presidency!" (which exists only in proofs, though issued as a book by the University of Kansas Press in 1956). But what about more than 150 pieces of prose of merely a few words? For example:

Banjo Poem [1328]

or "Tasso. Petrarch." [1864], or "Poem of the Trainer." [1317], or "Poe,? / The Cruise / ?A Cruise" [1337], or "(for name? 'Words, Words, Words'" [1688], or "See pp. 52-57 &c Alger's book" [1891], or "Ossian—Thoreau. Macpherson 1737-1796." [1731], or "Canteloupe. Muskmelon. Cantabile. Cacique City" [328]. It should also be mentioned that each of these appears on a page by itself, with a title, a headnote of three or four lines giving a description of the paper it appears on and other bibliographical details, and an attempt to date it. What's the value? What's the point? There are scholars who insist that absolutely everything by a major writer has value and should be preserved and published, but do 150 of such "pieces" belong among the *Collected Writings*? Or is it simply scholarship-gone-awry to print them with all the elaborate trappings of scholarship?

As usual with the volumes in the New York University Press's Whitman project, the format, printing, binding, especially the editing, and the full presentation are impeccable. Typographical misprints are at a minimum, and of relative unimpor-

tance; for example: "1813" for the correct "1823" (p. xxv); "four" and "Volume IV" for "six" and Volume VI" (top of p. xxix); "The Beginning" for "The Begining" (p. xl); "Eighteen" for "Eighteenth" (p. 209); "1865" for the "1855" (when Emerson received Whitman letter, p. 226); "Athors" for "Authors" (p. 913); and "*Walt Whitman's Prose*" for "*Walt Whitman's Pose*" (p. 1712).

Since the *Complete Writings of Walt Whitman* is still in use after 83 years, incomplete as they are and not rigorously edited by 20th-century standards, Professor Edward F. Grier's edition of the *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts* and the other volumes in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman* undoubtedly have a life-expectancy well into the 21st century, and beyond.

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